

SCENE
GLOBE
AWARD

THE RISE (& FALL?) OF THE RED CARPET

WHEN CELEBRATED English author Quentin Crisp famously said “fashion is what you adopt when you don’t know who you are,” he must have been watching a red carpet pre-show. It’s nearly impossible to list the slew of stars who have shaped their images and propelled their careers by using Christian Louboutin, Harry Winston, Marchesa or any other trademarked label to aid them in crossing the border from It girl-land to icon-hood.

A celebrity’s red carpet wardrobe used to be an afterthought. A sweet but dull LBD? Why not? A baggy suit? Who cares? Dressing appeared to come second to whatever awards show, movie premiere or charity event a star was attending, and outfits did little to define an actor or singer’s public persona. However, Uma Thurman’s now-famous saunter into the 1995 Academy Awards helped change all that. Wearing a pale lavender silk and chiffon Prada gown—a frock that ended up getting more press than her last three movies combined—Thurman set a posh precedent. So much so, the media’s burning magnifying glass began to descend closer onto the red carpet.

A decade after Thurman’s Prada hit the proverbial fan, a shift in tabloid magazines and a rise in tablog fashion websites occurred. Best- and worst-dressed lists were posted, printed, debated and discussed ad nauseam. “You are what you wear” became a certified Hollywood mantra, and a barrage of pre- and post-red carpet television programs boosted network ratings in record time. With the shows, came judge-jury-executioner-type commentary from questionable style authorities (Ryan Seacrest, anyone?), the use of insipid laser pointers outlining dress fit and 360-degree viewing platforms examining the minutiae of cut, stitch and colour. The social media set quickly got wise to the red carpet rise and a flood of self-appointed fashion critics started to weigh in on Oscar, Grammy and Golden Globe wardrobes in real time. Today, both fashion literacy and style-bashing have reached a pinnacle. With everyone and their mother now obsessed with dishing chic critique online, the Red Carpet Outfit has become more powerful than ever.

One quick read through any devoted fashion follower’s Twitter feed during a major awards show proves it. A dress is certainly not just a dress anymore. It can be a calling >

*Elio Iannacci
charts the
course of
today’s ÜBER-
STYLED,
over-analyzed
HOLLYWOOD
glamazon*

CLAIRE DANES
IN CALVIN KLEIN
AT THE GOLDEN
GLOBES



UMA THURMAN SIGNALLED A SHIFT IN RED CARPET DRESSING

REESE WITHERSPOON POPPED IN NINA RICCI

THE NEW GENERATION OF RED CARPET STYLE SETTERS

JULIA TO RIHANNA: CONTRAST BETWEEN VINTAGE AND RUNWAY PICKS

card (google “egg/Lady Gaga/Grammys”), a comeback vehicle (Claire Danes’ coral Calvin Klein number at this year’s Golden Globes), a relationship statement (think back to Reese Witherspoon’s post-divorce Nina Ricci outfits), a sign of revolt (Tilda Swinton’s recent suit at the BAFTAs), a political message (M.I.A.’s graphic burka at the 2010 Spike TV Scream Awards) or a signal of a major fashion leader transition.

Bronwyn Cosgrave, author of *Made for Each Other: Fashion and the Academy Awards*, says that today’s red carpet is going through the latter phase. Many of our tried-and-true awards show royals—a list that typically includes Jennifer Aniston, Nicole Kidman and Renée Zellweger—are being eclipsed by a new batch of eager red carpeters.

“YOUNGER ACTRESSES TEND TO BE MORE PRONE TO RISK TAKING”

“Hollywood and fashion are always about the new,” Cosgrave says of talents such as 27-year-old Mila Kunis, 21-year-old Emma Watson and 14-year-old Hailee Steinfeld. “These younger actresses tend to be more prone to risk taking,” she says. Carey Mulligan, 26, is a fan of quirky Prada and Miu Miu looks, while Natalie Portman, 29, single-handedly put Rodarte on the red carpet map. “Nowadays [they] are very aware of the mythology of Hollywood...Natalie Portman has been compared to Audrey Hepburn or a modern day equivalent. They all want to look iconic,” says Cosgrave.

To reach that nearly unattainable Audrey Hepburn/Grace Kelly plateau, up-and-comers ranging from Calvin Klein-clad Emma Stone to the Burberry-loving Watson are ditching the old-school formula of red carpet dressing. In fact, many of these younger starlets are stepping out on a sartorial limb and choosing to wear runway pieces that do not align with yesterday’s standard best-dressed hits.

“[At the Golden Globes], we saw Leighton Meester wearing a sleeved [Burberry Prorsum] slit dress with Cathy Waterman jewels rather than Chopard,” Cosgrave says of the change in brand loyalties. “When you see someone like Hilary Swank, who [at the 2000 Oscars] wore a Randolph Duke gown with an Asprey necklace—[Swank] looked more like Elizabeth I than a demure Hollywood star.”

A few of this year’s Grammy attendees radically reflect a new fearless wave of event dressing. For example, among the envelope-pushers, Lady Gaga (who arrived incubated in an egg wearing a newfangled Mugler piece), Nicki Minaj (who wore a head-to-toe leopard-print Givenchy look) and Rihanna (who donned a transparent Jean Paul Gaultier dress) all strayed from wearing the typical formal uniform. Trailing behind this trio was Jennifer Lopez, wearing something so similar to her usual office attire that a few snarky Twitterati falsely deemed it a repeat outfit. Which makes one wonder: If Lopez is getting slammed online for wearing a look that has worked for her in the past, >

how can young stars such as Lea Michele have the stylish strength to experiment and dismiss the tyranny of mass disapproval?

Cameron Silver—owner of L.A.'s popular vintage couture shop Decades—says that unlike the carpet rules of the past, more emerging stars—and their stylists—are valiantly choosing to set themselves apart. “The [new generation] brings a streamlined, very modern approach to the red carpet—it’s not kitchen sink dressing,” Silver explains. These new stars, he says, are using their clothes to say: “This is who I am, this is a clean silhouette, a beautiful colour and this is my body.”

Currently putting the finishing touches on a book that focuses on 20th century runway and red carpet fashion (to be published by Bloomsbury Press in 2012), Silver has spent more than 10 years tracing the progression of the red carpet. He has also had first-hand experience with star dressing as he’s dress-advised Cate Blanchett, Kristin Davis and Renée Zellweger for past awards shows.

“The evolution of the red carpet in the last 14 years is [as follows],” he says. “We switched from actresses buying a dress, to actresses working with a designer, to actresses now working with a stylist, to actresses launching their collections.” When you survey the celebs who have zigzagged up the who-wore-it-best lists—a cast of stars-turned-designers such as Victoria Beckham and Gwen Stefani—it’s Swarovski crystal clear that the new generation is expected to take fashion much more seriously if they are looking to expand their brand.

“We have a lot less train wrecks now,” Silver says. “Things are much more controlled... There are fittings going on for weeks. You are not going to see a self-designed dress anymore [à la Kim Basinger at the 1990 Oscars] because red carpet dressing is [now] so studied.”

“AN OSCAR DRESS HAS THE SAME CURRENCY AS A GREAT FILM ROLE”

A big reason why things are so monitored (“managers, publicists, moms all want to hit a home run—a red carpet moment,” Silver explains) is that millennial stars have grown up witnessing the impact of associating with the right trend. Consider Julia Roberts—who had been repeating her love of T-shirts and baggy jeans in interviews long before beauty companies were vying for her endorsements. Her vintage Valentino Academy Awards dress in 2001 hiked up her glamour quotient considerably. The dress was so beloved, it was included in an exhibit in London’s Design Museum, *Fifty Dresses That Changed The World*, as well as a subsequent book with the same name. Aside from pumping up Roberts’s profile, the couture piece also brought with it a prevailing message that promoted the notion of vintage shopping altogether.

“The smart ones realize that an Oscar dress has the >



RULE BREAKERS ON THE RED CARPET

GRAMMY

LADY GAGA AND NICKI MINAJ PUSH THE ENVELOPE

KIM BASINGER IN A SELF-DESIGNED FROCK AT THE 1990 OSCARS

KIM KARDASHIAN IS A STYLESPOF FAVOURITE